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# Time, Space, and Process in Anne Conway

Many scholars have drawn attention to the way that elements of Conway's system anticipate ideas found in Leibniz. This paper explores the relationship between Conway and Leibniz's work with regard to time, space, and process. It argues - against existing scholarship - that Conway is not a proto-Leibnizian relationist about time or space, and in fact her views lie much closer to those of Henry More; yet Conway and Leibniz agree on the primacy of process. This exploration advances our understanding of Conway's system, and the intellectual relationships between Conway, More, and Leibniz.

Key words: Anne Conway, Leibniz, time, space, process, Henry More

## 1 Introduction

In the 1670s, the English philosopher Anne Conway née Finch (1631-1679) developed a complex, vitalist metaphysics, described in her surviving treatise *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*. A copy of this text found its way to Leibniz, who would write in 1697 that his sentiments on philosophy come nearer (*approchent*) to those of Conway than to other philosophers<sup>1</sup>. Many scholars have since pointed to the ways that Conway's system anticipates or prefigures Leibniz's, sometimes characterising Conway as a proto-Leibnizian<sup>2</sup>. Some of these scholars (discussed below) find commonalities between Conway's and Leibniz's approach to time. This paper asks, Does Conway anticipate Leibniz with regard to time, space, or process? My answer is 'no' with regard to time and space; and 'yes' with regard to process. This enquiry will further our understanding of Conway's metaphysics, and her intellectual relationships with Leibniz and others.

The paper will proceed as follows. Section 2 introduces Conway and her work. Section 3 argues, against existing scholarship, that Conway is *not* a proto-Leibnizian about time or space. Instead, Conway's ontologies of time and space bear key commonalities with those of Cambridge Platonist Henry More, Conway's one-time tutor and friend. Section 4 argues that Conway *is* a proto-Leibnizian in the sense that they are both process philosophers, placing a huge emphasis on the importance of change. Section 5 concludes.

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<sup>1</sup> This letter was first published in English by Sharpe (1744, 149).

<sup>2</sup> Caroline Merchant (1979b) argues for the influence of Conway on Leibniz. Hutton (2004, 2) describes the similarities between their work as 'striking'. Schroeder (2007, 77) states that the fact of Conway's influence on Leibniz is not a matter of dispute - merely its extent. See also Nicolson (CL xxvii), Lopton (1982, 1-58), Merchant (1983, 264-7), and Coudert and Corse (CC xxx-xxxiii).

## 2 Introducing Conway

### 2.1 Conway's intellectual context

Conway's work is best understood placed in its intellectual context<sup>3</sup>. From at least 1650, Conway and More embarked on an informal philosophy correspondence course, with Conway as pupil and More as teacher. Ultimately, this relationship developed into one of intellectual equality, and they became lifelong friends. Later in life, Conway also became friends with the physician and vitalist Francis Mercury van Helmont, who in turn was connected to Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, a kabbalah scholar. Von Rosenroth believed that the kabbalah - an esoteric Jewish tradition seeking to understand the relationship between God and his creation - could be used to unlock the mysteries of the Christian Bible. From 1677-1684, von Rosenroth published his three volume *Kabbala Denudata*, a mammoth work containing Latin translations of various kabbalistic texts, and kabbalistic essays (including pieces by van Helmont and More).

Towards the end of her life, likely from 1677 to early 1679, Conway began working on a notebook, which would later be published as her *Principles*<sup>4</sup>. The notebook was written in English but, at some point after Conway's death, van Helmont and More translated it into Latin, and the original was lost. It seems likely that van Helmont and More also edited the text, but to what degree is unknown. The Latin translation of Conway's notebook is our primary source for her philosophical views, although some of her correspondence has also survived, published in the *Conway Letters*.

After Conway's death, van Helmont gave a copy of her *Principles* to Leibniz. Although the book was published anonymously, Leibniz was clearly aware of its authorship, as his copy is inscribed 'La comtesse de Konnouay'. Leibniz was impressed by Conway's *Principles* and referred to on several occasions.

### 2.2 Conway's metaphysical system

Conway's *Principles* argues that God is creator of all things (CC 9; I:3) and there are three kinds of species. First, God, the highest being. Second, Christ, who acts as a mediator between God and creatures (CC 24-5; V:3-4); sometimes Conway refers to Christ using the kabbalistic name 'Adam Kadmon'. Third, created creatures, the lowest beings; sometimes these are described as 'monads'. All creatures are alive, and in every creature there is matter and spirit, as matter and spirit are modes of a single substance (CC 38; VI:11). This position simultaneously rejects materialism,

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<sup>3</sup> For a full intellectual biography, see Hutton (2004).

<sup>4</sup> On the dating and other issues surrounding the notebook, see Lopton (1982, 7-9).

held by the likes of Hobbes and Margaret Cavendish; and substance dualism, held by the likes of Descartes and More.

A core theme in Conway's *Principles* is mutability or change. God is eternal and unchanging, as is his will to create, from which it follows that 'time is infinite from the moment of creation' and God gave being to creatures from time 'everlasting' (CC 12-13; II:1-4).

Although Conway does not provide us with much detail, as mediator Christ appears to occupy a kind of ontological middle ground. Christ shares eternity, which belongs to God; and time, which belongs to creatures (CC 26; V:4).

Unlike God, creatures are intensely mutable (CC 28; VI:1). Creatures are continually transmuting or metamorphosing: 'we see water change into stone, stones into earth, earth into trees, and trees into animals or living creatures' (CC 26; V:6). The way that creatures change is connected to divine justice: when they change for the better, they are rewarded by becoming more purely spirit; when they change for the worst, they are punished by becoming more purely corporeal (CC 35-6; VI:7). These changes involve a succession of states. For example, in the context of asking whether God created all creatures at the same time, Conway writes:

if the word *create* refers to God himself... then creation occurred simultaneously. But if *create* refers to the creatures, then it occurred successively. For just as it is the nature and essential attribute of God, to be immutable and without succession; so the nature of creatures consists in this, that they are mutable and successive (my translation; IV:1)<sup>5</sup>.

As we will see, Conway's ontology of time is intimately connected to the successive nature of creatures.

### 3 Conway as a proto-Leibnizian about Time and Space?

#### 3.1 Conway on time

Several scholars have discussed time in Conway, and they all claim that Conway holds a Leibnizian position. They ground their interpretation in passages from the *Principles* such as this:

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<sup>5</sup> ...*Sicut enim natura & essentielle attributum Dei est, ut sit immutabilis sive sine successione; ita natura creaturarum in eo consistit, ut sint mutabiles & successivae* (Conway, repr. 1982, 79; IV:1).

time is nothing but the successive motion or operation of creatures, and if this motion or operation should cease, then time itself would cease and the creatures themselves would end with time since the nature of every creature is to be in motion or to have motion (CC 14; II:6)<sup>6</sup>.

Peter Loftson (1982, 40) writes that Conway's position on time is similar to Leibniz's. A decade later, Lois Frankel (1991, 47) agrees that, on time, Conway's position 'is very much like' Leibniz's. More cautiously, Schroeder (2007, 93) writes that Conway's response to questions about time 'partly anticipates Leibniz'.

These scholars are not suggesting that Conway read any of Leibniz's texts. Nor do they claim that Conway's account of time is *identical* to Leibniz's, merely that they are similar. Nonetheless, the claims of Loftson and Frankel especially carry weight, as these scholars have both worked on Leibniz's metaphysics. In order to properly understand Conway's ontology of time and space, the claim that Conway is a proto-Leibnizian in these regards must be undermined.

As Loftson discusses Conway's metaphysics in exceptional detail, I will focus on his reading. At the start of his discussion, Loftson (1982, 3) states that Conway is a 'disbeliever in absolute time'. Absolutism can be characterised as the view that time, duration, or space is independent of human minds and material bodies<sup>7</sup>. Loftson grounds his reading on the Conway passage above:

Time for her, as for Leibniz, "is nothing else but the successive Motion or Operation of Creatures..." Without change on this view... there is no time. To be a changing thing, e.g., to be in motion, is to be in time. That which does not change is outside time (Loftson, 1982, 30).

A little later, Loftson (1982, 40) concludes that for Conway 'time is strictly equivalent with change'.

Loftson appears to be reasoning as follows. If Conway holds that time is the motions or operations of creatures, then she is not an absolutist, as in the absence of creatures there would not be time. Conway's position would be analogous to someone who identifies time with the motions of bodies, a non-absolutist position. So far, this is clear. What is less clear is why Loftson and Frankel claim that, in holding this view, Conway's position is similar to Leibniz's.

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<sup>6</sup> *tempus nihil aliud est quam successiva motio, sive operatio creaturarum, quae motio sive operatio si cessatura esset, tempus similiter esset cessaturum...* (Conway, repr. 1982, 69; II:6).

<sup>7</sup> This characterisation is compatible with existing scholarship. Hutton (1977, 363) refers to the 'measure of independence' accorded to absolute time. Janiak (2008, 152) emphasises independence in distinguishing absolutisms about space. Edwards (2013, 1) writes that absolute time is 'wholly independent' of anything external.

Leibniz's account of time is notoriously controversial but Frankel (1981, 91) lays out the bones of it here: 'Leibniz's position on space and time, as generally understood, is that they are ideal entities and that they are mere phenomena based on the relations between the objects which are 'in' them'. Space is founded on the positions of objects, whilst time is founded on the relations of succession within the states of the same object or different objects. Leibnizian relationism allows for spatial ordering amongst bodies whilst rejecting the absolutist position that space is independent of bodies<sup>8</sup>.

Relationism is the traditional rival of absolutism. It has its roots in the Leibniz-Clarke correspondence, wherein Leibniz attacks Newtonian absolutism and - in passages such as this - appears to defend relationism:

I hold *Space* to be something *merely relative*, as *Time* is; that I hold it to be an *Order of Coexistences*, as *Time* is an *Order of Successions*. For *Space* denotes, in Terms of Possibility, an *Order of Things* which exist at the same time, considered as existing *together*; without enquiring into their Manner of Existing (Leibniz, 1717, 57; III.4).

Time is based on the places things occupy in successive orders. Later, Leibniz (1717, 201; V.47) compares spatio-temporal relations to genealogical lines of relations, 'wherein every Person would have his Place'. Leibniz argues that although the persons in those lines might change place - such that he who was a father, or a grandson, might become a son - nonetheless these lines 'though they should express real Truths, would only be Ideal things'. This description of genealogical lines as 'ideal' implies that they are mind-dependent, in turn implying that space and time are mind-dependent; the difference is that, where genealogical lines are grounded in persons, space and time are grounded in bodies or substances<sup>9</sup>.

There are similarities between Leibniz's views on time and Conway's. For example, they both reject absolutism, agreeing that time does not exist independently of created things such as creatures or bodies. Further, as temporal relations can only hold between distinct states, it is true for Leibniz that in the absence of change there would be no time: for Leibniz and Conway, there would be no time in an unchanging universe. In contrast, for the absolutist, time would continue regardless of whether anything changed.

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<sup>8</sup> Although most scholars read Leibniz in this vein, not all do. For a recent introduction to the literature, and relationist reading of Leibniz, see Belot (2011, 173-85).

<sup>9</sup> I say bodies *or* substances because a live debate in Leibniz scholarship concerns the temporal and spatial status of substances, monads; as opposed to material bodies, usually taken to be appearances well-founded on monads. This is precisely the debate that Frankel (1981) is concerned with.

However, there are at least three significant dissimilarities between Leibniz and Conway. First, Leibniz expresses his metaphysics of time in terms of relations, whereas Conway never uses such language. There is no indication that Conway is a relationist at all. Second, Leibniz describes time as ‘ideal’ or ‘phenomenal’; Conway does not. Third, whereas there is a strong case to be made for reading Leibnizian monads as not being in time (more on this below) no such case can be made for Conway’s monads. On the contrary, Conway tells us repeatedly that monads are in time: creatures have existed from time everlasting, and have their beginnings and endings in time. (And indeed, this is what we should expect, if time is ‘nothing but’ the successive motions or operations of creatures). This last dissimilarity is especially significant because it allows Conway to avoid a problem facing Leibniz’s metaphysics; I will make a brief digression to explain how.

Leibniz holds that monads are continually changing state, and Bertrand Russell objected that this is incompatible with (what is arguably) Leibniz’s further view that monads are not temporal. Russell (1937, 51-3) reads Leibniz as attempting to eliminate time from monads but argues that Leibniz fails, because a monad has a state at one moment, and not at the next moment. Russell concludes that time is necessarily presupposed in Leibniz’s treatment of substance, and the fact it is denied in the conclusion ‘is not a triumph, but a contradiction’. More recent scholars have expressed similar sentiments on the presupposition of time in monads<sup>10</sup>. Leibniz’s apparent conjunction of theses - that monads change *and* are not in time - is extremely unusual. Other philosophers who deny the fundamental reality of time, such as Russell’s contemporary J. M. E. McTaggart, *also* deny the fundamental reality of change. Although I have somewhat simplified Russell’s charge, and there are replies to be made on Leibniz’s behalf<sup>11</sup>, it remains true that here is a problem facing Leibniz’s metaphysics of time that does not face Conway’s. Conway’s conjunction of theses - that monads change *and* are in time - allows her to avoid Russell’s objection altogether.

So far, I have argued that Conway is not an absolutist about time, nor a proto-Leibnizian relationist or phenomenalist. Conway states repeatedly that time is nothing but the successive motion or operation of creatures. Here is another example:

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<sup>10</sup> For example, McGuire (1976, 315) writes, ‘Since states exist at one moment and not at the next, activity is irredeemably temporal’. Frankel (1979, 93) agrees that succession is a temporal notion and monads must be in time.  
<sup>11</sup> For example, against Russell, Arthur (1985, 276) argues we need not consider a monad as having different states at different moments of time, as the states of monads can be distinguished by their compatibility with other states.

It cannot be said, however, of a creature that it exists in all or many times and does not change, since a creature always changes with time; for time is nothing but the motion or change of creatures from one condition or state to another<sup>12</sup> (CC 51; VII:4).

If Conway is not an absolutist or proto-Leibnizian about time, how should we understand these claims? I suggest the answer lies in More.

To make this case, it is necessary to give a little background to More's metaphysics. More's views on time and space evolved over the course of his career, and I will only detail the views relevant to this paper<sup>13</sup>.

More's early account of time was directly inspired by the neo-Platonist Plotinus. Plotinus' *Enneads* characterise eternity as the World Soul at rest. Plotinus (trans. 1969, III.7.3-7) argues that we know eternity as 'a Life changelessly motionless', without succession or change. In contrast, Plotinus (trans. 1969, III.7.11) claims that time is the World Soul in motion. Time is a 'descent' from eternity, in the sense that there is no time in eternity but there is the latent concept of time. When the World Soul stirred from its rest to create the natural world, time stirred with it, so that the created world involves succession, change, and time. As Plotinus puts it, 'To bring this Cosmos into being, the [World] Soul first laid aside its eternity and clothed itself with Time'. In notes appended to the 1647 edition of his *Philosophical Poems*, More sets out an account of time that explicitly draws on Plotinus. To illustrate, More (repr. 1878, 136) writes, 'For what is time but the perseverance of the motion of the soul of the world, while she by her restless power brings forth these things in succession, that Eternity hath at once altogether'.

Is More's early account of time absolutist? How we answer this question will depend on how we understand the relationship it posits between time and created beings. I suggest there are two possibilities. First, time could be understood as a kind of *container* for the things that exist successively in time, a container that is independent of, and prior to, its contents; this would be an absolutist position, and there is evidence that Plotinus holds it<sup>14</sup>. Second, time could be *identified* with the successive existences of created beings, such that time *is* succession and change in the created world; this would be a non-absolutist position. More's *Poems* makes no explicit remarks on the relationship between time and created beings, so we cannot be certain which position it is taking.

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<sup>12</sup> ...tempora nihil sint nisi motio vel mutatio creaturae, a una conditione statuve in alium (Conway, repr. 1982, 116; VII:4).

<sup>13</sup> For more on the evolution of More's views on space, see Reid (2012, 96-7); on time, see my (2015).

<sup>14</sup> : Plotinus (trans. 1969, III.7.12) states firmly that time is a thing 'within itself', a thing 'in which all movement and rest exist'.



More's mature views can be found in texts such as his 1668 *Divine Dialogues* and 1671 *Enchiridion Metaphysicum*. Here, More (1668, 559; III: 40) argues that there is an eternal duration before the creation of the world, and this duration 'is the proper and necessary eternal duration of God'. Just as eternal duration is God's eternity, infinite space is God's immensity. As More (trans. 1995, 57-60; VIII: 7-13) puts it, 'that infinite extension which is supposed by the common people to be mere space, is indeed a certain substance, and that incorporeal, or spirit' - God. In these texts, More explains that eternal duration and infinite space are attributes of God. More understands 'attribute' in the Cartesian sense of the term, so although we can conceptually distinguish between God and his attributes, in reality there is no distinction between them.

Andrew Janiak (2008, 152) usefully differentiates two kinds of absolutism about space: 'strong absolutism' holds that space exists independently of every entity; and 'weak absolutism' holds that space exists independently of all material bodies and their possible relations but depends on God. More's is a form of weak absolutism: space would not exist independently of God.

It has been argued that More's mature account of space and duration was enormously influential, and that it was used as a source by later absolutists including Joseph Raphson, John Turner, Samuel Clarke, George Cheyne, and of course Newton<sup>15</sup>. However, perhaps surprisingly, none of More's views on space or time seem to have been taken up by any of his fellow Cambridge Platonists, or thinkers associated with Cambridge Platonism. Many of these figures - including Benjamin Whichcote (1609-1683), Peter Sterry (1613-1672), John Smith (1618-1652), Nathaniel Culverwell (1619-1651), John Worthington (1618-1671) and John Norris (1657-1711) - refrain from offering a metaphysic of space or time at all. Even the members of the group who lived into the 1660s and 1670s, who would have had the opportunity to read More's mature views on time, duration or space, do not comment on these parts of More's work. The exception to this neglect is Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688), who was clearly aware of More's mature absolutism even though he did not endorse it<sup>16</sup>.

Jasper Reid (2012, 266-7) has argued that, although More's *Poems* were several decades old by the time Conway wrote her *Principles*, she was still 'greatly enamoured' of them<sup>17</sup>. There are many commonalities between Conway's *Principles* and More's *Poems*, and several pertain to time. For example, Conway's God lacks time and succession yet - as part of God's continual action of creation - the created world has both time and succession:

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<sup>15</sup> On space, see Reid (2012, 215-36) and Leech (2013, 176-93); on time and duration, see Thomas (2015, 18-9).

<sup>16</sup> See Reid (2012, 222-4).

<sup>17</sup> In support, Reid points to Conway's 1669/1670 request for More to translate a Greek verse from one of the minor poems (CL 299); and she writes in a 1675/1676 letter that his book of poems is one 'I highly value' (CL 420).

this continual action or operation of God, insofar as it is in him, proceeds from him, or insofar as it refers to himself, is only one continual action or command of his will; it has no succession or time in it, no before or after, but is always simultaneously present to God so that nothing is past or future because he has no parts. But insofar as it is manifested in or terminates in creatures, it is temporal (*tempus*) and has a succession of parts (CC 18; III:8).

Unlike More's *Poems*, Conway's *Principles* is explicit with regard to the relationship between time and created beings: she tells us that time 'just is' the motions and operations of creatures. God's continual creativity is manifested in creatures, and their successive activities is identified with time.

Reading Conway through a Morean lens allows for an alternative reading of passages in her *Principles* that Loptson finds problematic. Conway holds that although there is no time in God, God is in time:

the divine eternity has no times in it and nothing in it can be said to be past or future, but it is always and wholly present. And while he is in time, he is not bound by time<sup>18</sup> (CC 14; II:5).

In holding that God is unbounded by time, Conway presumably means that God's existence is infinite with regard to time, whereas the existence of creatures is finite or bounded in time. Loptson writes of this passage:

It is one thing to claim God outside time... It is something altogether different to claim that God is in time, but the nature of his temporal experience is such that, unlike us, who "perceive" past and future events as distant, only the present as immediate, God perceives all events, past present, and future, as immediate. If we suppress the idea of God being in time at all, except in the sense of being in relation to creatures and events which are temporal in themselves, we may perhaps see no contradiction here (Loptson, 1982, 32).

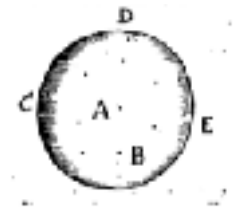
Loptson appears to find the account of temporal divine presence described by Conway contradictory. To resolve this 'contradiction', Loptson argues we should suppress the idea that God is in time.

Against Loptson, I argue there is an alternative reading of Conway's remarks available that is not contradictory. I suggest we read Conway not as remarking on God's perception of time, but as explaining that God is holo-merically present in time. Again, this requires a little background.

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<sup>18</sup> ... *aeternitas divina nulla in se habet tempora, nihilque in ipsa dici potest praeteritum vel futurum, sed illa tota & semper praesens est, inque temporibus quidem est, se ab iisdem non comprehenditur* (Conway, repr. 1982, 69; II:5).

God's presence in time or space can be understood in various ways, and I give two here (there are likely more). One might hold that God is in all times and spaces metaphorically, in virtue of his power to act everywhere. Alternatively, one might hold that God is literally present in time or space. The scholastics conceived two ways of being present in space: some things are present with 'parts outside of parts', whilst others are present with 'the whole in the whole and the whole in each part'. Things that have parts outside of parts include material things such as a human body: its parts - its hands, organs and feet - are spread out through space. Let's label the way that material bodies are present in space as *extendedly present*. In contrast, an immaterial spirit could exist with the whole in the whole and the whole in each part: the whole soul is in each of its parts, so its parts are identical to each other and the whole. I label something that exists in space this way *holenmerically present*. More (trans. 1995, I 108; XXVII.11) provides a helpful diagram to illustrate holenmerism, explaining that on this view the entire spirit 'fully occupies and possesses' the whole body CDE and that it is entirely in every part or point of the body, including A and B. We can make a parallel distinction for presence in time. Just as an immaterial substance may be holenmerically present in space, it may be holenmerically present in time, such that its being exists wholly at every successive moment of time. Similarly, just as an immaterial substance may be extendedly present in space, it may be extendedly present in time, such that its being is 'spread out' across the successive parts of time.



To support my suggestion that Conway's God is holenmerically present in time, let's contrast God's presence in time with that of creatures. Creatures exist successively, and change over the course of that succession. To illustrate, the existence of a tree is 'spread out' over successive moments of time: during its early life the tree was a sapling, and late in life it is a hoary oak. Midway through its life, the part of the tree's existence as a sapling is *past* to it; and the part of its existence as a hoary tree is *future* to it. In contrast, God's presence in time is not successive in the sense that his being is not spread out through time, and of course he does not change; in this sense, there is nothing in God that can be said to be past or future. God is *wholly* present in every moment of time. As Conway emphasises later, 'God is really and intimately present in all times and does not change'<sup>19</sup> (CC 51; VII:4). On my alternative reading of Conway, God is in time like us but the nature of his temporal experience is unlike ours: we are extendedly present in time, and God is holenmerically present in time.

<sup>19</sup> *Deus tamen realiter & intime sit praesens in omnibus temporibus, & non mutatur* (Conway, repr. 1982, 116; VII:4).

There is a case to be made that holenmerism is contradictory (a case that perhaps Loftson would accept). In the early modern period, Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651, 373; IV.46) argued that spatial holenmerism led to 'absurdities'. Henry More came to agree, and attacked spatial holenmerism in several later texts including the *Enchiridion Metaphysicum*, where More (trans. 1995, I 109-11; XXVII.12-13) objects that the very idea 'seems close to a clear contradiction or repugnancy'. For example, More argues that if the whole of a spirit were present at one point, there would be none left for it to be present at another<sup>20</sup>. Some scholars seem to have been impressed by the arguments from Hobbes and More against the coherence of holenmerism<sup>21</sup>, but not all. For example, Robert Pasnau considers one of the absurdities Hobbes believes holenmerism leads to: that the whole soul of a person is in their finger, as well as in every other part of their body. Pasnau (2011, 341) argues this shows Hobbes at his 'philosophical worst': 'the consequences he describes are ones that proponents of holenmerism insist on, and that they take to be distinctive of immaterial entities... it is their very weirdness that justifies a dualism between two fundamentally different kinds of entities, material and immaterial'. Further, it has been argued that More's attack on holenmerism is misguided because More builds mistaken assumptions into his understanding of immaterial substances<sup>22</sup>. Although holenmerism may seem strange to the twenty-first century reader, we need not believe it is contradictory. And, in any case, it was extremely widely held throughout the medieval and early modern period, perhaps even by Descartes<sup>23</sup>.

If Conway is a temporal holenmerist, we can further ask, Of the sources we know Conway had access to, which might she be drawing on? Temporal holenmerism is not found in the *Kabbala Denudata*. Having stated that God is present in each moment of time, Conway's *Principles* (CC 14; II:5) adds that the Hebrews 'speak a little differently' about these matters, and provides several references. One of these references directs us to passages in the first volume of the *Kabbala Denudata* - see von Rosenroth (1677-8, II.29-30) - which explains that in the supreme Light there is no time, as the Light has always existed and will exist forever (*cum semper extiterit & maneat perpetuo*). In contrast, that which emanates from the Light has a beginning and end, and is not deprived of time (*nec tempore destituuntur*). Like Conway's *Principles*, these passages state that there is no time in God; however, unlike Conway's *Principles*, no further allowance is made for the idea that God is nonetheless in each moment of time. This provides further evidence of Hutton's

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<sup>20</sup> On More's gradual rejection of spatial holenmerism, see Reid (2012, 158-72) and Leech (2013, 59-63).

<sup>21</sup> See Grant (1981, 253), and McGuire and Slowik (2012, 277).

<sup>22</sup> See Pasnau (2011, 341-3) and Kochiras (2012, 65-6).

<sup>23</sup> For more on its history, see Rozemond (2003), Pasnau (2011, 333-49), and McGuire and Slowik (2012).

(1999, 38) thesis that, whilst influenced by the kabbalah, Conway is ‘highly selective’ with regard to the parts that she incorporates into her system.

Nor is temporal holenmerism found in the ‘Helmontiana’, a group of texts attributed to van Helmont with varying degrees of certainty. Loftson (1982, 19) briefly states that one of these texts, *Seder Olam*, expresses the same views as Conway’s *Principles* on time. However, this is not quite correct. *Seder Olam* expresses *some* of the same views found in Conway’s *Principles*. For example, van Helmont (1694, 5-6) argues that God is unchangeable whilst creatures are changeable; and that God is a creator from eternity, and therefore made creatures from infinite ages. However, no mention is made of God’s presence in time, or indeed of the nature of time more generally. These issues do not make an appearance in the Helmontiana *A Cabbalistical Dialogue*, or *Two Hundred Queries*; or in further texts associated with van Helmont, including *The Paradoxical Discourses*, and *The Spirit of Diseases*<sup>24</sup>.

However, temporal holenmerism *is* found in More. Despite his mature rejection of spatial holenmerism for all immaterial entities, More held throughout his career that God is temporally holenmeric. Reid (2012, 182) makes a case for this reading of More’s early *Poems*, arguing that a description More offers of Eternity or Christ as a life exhibiting ‘all things at once, and in one’ implies that it is the nature of Eternity or Christ that they exist wholly at every moment in time. Later, in the 1679 edition of the *Enchiridion Metaphysicum*, More (trans. 1995, I:18; II: Scholium) states that he is of the opinion of those who ‘assign duration even to eternity, which however I consider in no way to be successive’. God’s eternity is present ‘at all physical moments’ (*omnibusque Temporis Physici momentis adesse*). It is this last claim that is particularly indicative of holenmerism. For More, moments in time are successive in the sense that they are spread out in time, one after another, akin to the way that the parts of space are spread out. By holding that God is present at every moment, yet denying that God’s duration is successive, More implies that God’s being is not spread out through time: God is holenmerically present in time.

Reid (2012, 183) discusses More’s mature asymmetric attitudes to divine presence in space and time: ‘even after he had made this shift away from the holenmerian account of the divine omnipresence, he still continued to embrace its analogue in the case of the divine eternity’. Perhaps the fact that More never doubted temporal holenmerism also explains why Conway maintained her temporal holenmerism, despite More’s attack on spatial holenmerism. To offer a further piece of

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<sup>24</sup> Francis Mercury van Helmont was the son of Jan Baptist van Helmont, who wrote “De Tempore”, an essay arguing for absolutism about time. As Francis Mercury edited and translated his father’s works, it is surprising he does not have more to say on the ontology of time himself.

speculation, it may be significant that, in More's early *Poems*, More specifically describes *Christ's* existence in time as *holenmeric*. As we saw above, Conway holds that Christ shares the eternity of God, and the time of creatures, so perhaps Conway is also following More in ascribing *holenmerism* to Christ.

In any case, if we use *holenmerism* to make sense of Conway's view that God is in time yet there is no past or future in God, we can rebuff Loptson's charge of contradiction and more charitably read Conway as holding the same position as More on divine presence in time.

### 3.2 Conway on space

I have argued Conway is not an absolutist about time, but nor is she a proto-Leibnizian in this regard. This section argues that Conway's views on space lie even further away from Leibniz's, as there is some evidence that here she was an absolutist. This will take some explaining.

Conway holds that the universe is infinitely large: 'the entire universe or system of creatures as a whole is infinite'. She argues that those who deny this - who hold that the number of creatures is finite and that 'the whole body of the universe occupies so many acres or miles' - are effectively reducing the great majesty of God 'to a paltry and unseemly scale'. To reduce God's majesty to a finite universe is to cage him. Conway goes on to explain that some do not confine God to a finite material universe but imagine God to exist outside this material universe 'in infinite imaginary spaces' (CC 17-18; III:6-7).

Against the view that the material world is finite but surrounded by infinite space, Conway writes:

If these spaces are merely imaginary, they are nothing but the most idle conceits of the brain. But if they are real entities, what else can they be but creatures of God? Moreover, God works either in these spaces or not. If not, God is not there, for wherever he is, there he works... For God always works, and his work is to create and give being to creatures<sup>25</sup> (CC 18; III:7).

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<sup>25</sup> *Si spatia haec imaginaria mere sunt imaginaria, illa sane non nisi vanissima sunt cerebri figmenta, si vero entia sunt realia, quid aliud esse possunt quam Creaturae Dei. Praeterea Deus vel operator in spatiis istis vel non: Si non, Deus ibi non est, ubicumque enim est, ibi operatur... Ita enim Deus perpetuo operatur, opusque ejus est creare* (Conway, repr. 1982, 74-5; III:7).

This passage tells us that real empty spaces - real spaces devoid of creatures - are impossible, for God creates creatures in any real space<sup>26</sup>.

By itself, this passage does not tell us what Conway's ontology of space is. Two kinds of possibilities present themselves. First, Conway may hold that real spaces and creatures coexist because - parallel to her account of time - Conway identifies space with creatures. This position would be analogous to Descartes' position on the relationship between space and matter. Descartes holds that the principal attribute of material substance is extension in length, breadth, and depth. As Descartes further holds there is no real distinction between a substance and its attributes, the extension that constitutes a space is in reality identical to the extension that constitutes a material body (CSM I 227; AT VIIIA 45). This entails that, for Descartes, there is no space really distinct from body: space just is extended body. If Conway holds a view of this kind then, for her, space 'just is' extended creatures. This would be a non-absolutist position. Schroeder (2007, 95) makes a few brief remarks on Conway's account of space - which he takes to be akin to Leibniz's - and he seems to read Conway this way, writing that her beings 'constitute' space.

Second, Conway may hold that space and creatures coexist not because there is no real distinction between them, but merely because wherever there is real space God fills it with creatures. On this position, Conway would be arguing that empty space is impossible for the same reason it is impossible that the created universe is spatially finite: God's ongoing creative action results in profundity, such that his creation is infinite, and creation fills every part of space. A similar thesis can be found in More, who holds that the (finite) material universe is a plenum, and appears to ground this in God's profundity: in a 1649 letter to Descartes, More (1662, 77) explains that 'the fecundity of the divine, which is nowhere idle, has produced matter in every place, missing out not even the narrowest of spaces' (my translation)<sup>27</sup>. If Conway holds this kind of position, it would be absolutist, as space would be independent of creatures.

There is evidence that we should attribute the second position to Conway. The Annotations to the first chapter of Conway's *Principles* explain that creatures cannot endure God's highest light, and so God acted as follows:

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<sup>26</sup> There is evidence that Conway held this position long before her *Principles*. In their early correspondence More and Conway discussed Cartesian metaphysics and, in a letter to Conway dated 5 May 1651 (written in response to a letter that unfortunately has not survived), More writes that she 'in courtesy seems to take the strangers [Descartes'] part and leans toward his opinion that there can not be an empty space' (CL 486). This seems to have been an ongoing point of controversy. In a letter to More dated 3 December 1651, Conway writes, 'because my tediousnesse upon one subject may not weary you I shall Lay aside our old controversie: whether there be a vacuum' (CL 493).

<sup>27</sup> *foecunditatem nempe divinam, cum nullibi sit otiosa, ubique locorum materiam produxisse, nullis vel angustissimis praetermissis intervallis.*

For the sake of his creatures (so that there might be a place for them) he diminished the highest degree of his intense light. Thus a place arose, like an empty circle, a space (*spatium*) for worlds. This void was not privation or non-being but an actual place of diminished light, which was the soul of the Messiah, called Adam Kadmon by the Hebrews, who filled this entire space (*spatium implebatur*)... [This Messiah] made from within himself... the succession of all creatures (CC 10; I: Annotations).

There are two important points in this passage. First, place or space arises prior to creatures. (Presumably, as creation is eternal, this priority must be metaphorical or ontological rather than temporal, but either way space is independent of creatures.) Second, place or space is intimately connected to God. However, the nature of that intimate connection is not the same as that found in More's mature work. Whereas More is explicit that space is God's attribute of immensity, no such remarks are found here. Additionally, a little later, the *Principles* states:

According to the Hebrews, the infinite God... is said to exist outside the place of the world because a creature could not comprehend the immensity of his light. (See what is said in the annotations to the first chapter.) Nor can he be said to exist in imaginary spaces, because evidently no space coincides with God (CC 18; III.7)

Unlike on More's mature account of space, space does not coincide with God.

Although the details of Conway's absolutism about space differ from More's, there are similarities. Like More, Conway appears to be a weak absolutist: space depends on God, given that God created it by diminishing his light. Additionally, both appear to find divine space in the kabbalah; for example, More (trans.1995, 61; VIII.14) writes that the Cabbalists enumerate place among the attributes of God<sup>28</sup>.

There is one final remark to make on reading Conway as an absolutist: we cannot be absolutely certain that the Annotations were authored by Conway. It is possible that they were added by a later editorial hand, because some of the Annotations reference material that was published after Conway's death, so Conway could only have authored all of the Annotations herself if she had access to unpublished drafts of the requisite materials, perhaps via von Rosenroth. However, the fact that the *Principles* makes two distinct references to the Hebrew creation story adds weight to the thesis that they were authored by Conway. What we can be certain of is that

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<sup>28</sup> More references Cornelius Agrippa, rather than any of the texts contained in the *Kabbala Denudata*. See Copenhaver (1980, 515-29).



Conway is not a proto-Leibnizian on space: there is no hint here of Leibniz's relationism or phenomenalism.

#### 4 Conway as a proto-Leibnizian about Process?

Although I deny that Conway is a proto-Leibnizian about time or space, I argue she is a proto-Leibnizian about process. To explain this, I'll provide a brief overview of process philosophy in general and process readings of Leibniz in particular.

'Substance philosophy' takes *things* to be basic, and emphasises their *persistence* through change. For example, things such as human bodies or trees may appear to persist through changes but these changes are of secondary importance, or even illusory. In contrast, 'process philosophy' takes *processes* to be basic, and emphasises their *changing*. Classic examples of processes include dynamic entities or events like lives, thunderstorms, and rivers, which are continually changing or happening. However, entities that we usually conceive as things - such as human bodies or trees - can also be conceived as processes, if we emphasise their changing or happening rather than their persistence through change. In effect, process philosophy emphasises the primacy of process and change, rather than thing-ness and persistence. On the primacy of process, Nicholas Rescher (1996, 8) writes that 'the process philosopher is, effectively by definition, one who holds that what exists in nature is not just originated and sustained by processes but is in fact ongoingly and inexorably *characterised* by them'<sup>29</sup>.

Leibniz is frequently characterised as a process philosopher. Leibnizian monads continually 'perceive', a process whereby the multitude of the external world is represented in a unified consciousness. 'Appetition' is the internal principle within each monad that drives the passage from one perception to another. In light of these aspects of his metaphysics, Rescher characterises Leibniz as a process philosopher, and it will be helpful to give his reading:

The principal standard bearer of process theory in modern philosophy was Leibniz... The world, in fact, consists of clusters of minute, virtually punctiform processes he called *monads* (units), which are "centres of force" - in fact, bundles of activity...

Each of these monads is endowed with an inner drive, an "appetition" which ongoingly destabilises it and provides for a processual course of never-ending change... the internally programmed dynamism of a monad leads it to unfold naturally over the course of time (Rescher, 1996, 12-13).

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<sup>29</sup> For broader introductions to process philosophy, see Rescher (1996, 1-2) and Seibt (2016).

Similarly, Johanna Seibt (2016, §1) writes that Leibniz developed a ‘fully-fledged process-based metaphysics’, on which monads are ‘ordered sequences of states of affairs consisting of the co-exemplification of properties during some period of time’. Leaving aside these somewhat anachronistic characterisations of Leibnizian monads, it is evident that there are solid grounds for describing Leibniz as a process philosopher<sup>30</sup>.

In addition, I argue there are solid grounds for describing Conway as a process philosopher. Like Leibniz, Conway’s monads are bundles of activity, beings that are continually changing. Further, unlike Leibniz’s monads, Conway’s monads are decisively *in time*. In a rare discussion of the relationship between process philosophy and the ontology of time, Rescher argues that process thought always grounds space and time in processes. Rescher (1996, 94) claims that processes throughout nature ‘intertwine and interrelate’, and ‘the spatiotemporality of nature is nothing but a characteristic feature of this manifold’. Rescher (1996, 95) describes two ways of conceiving space: as a Newtonian (i.e. absolute) ‘container’ which is independent of the processes happening within it, or as itself a Leibnizian process constituted by processes. By this, Rescher seems to mean that space is a process, something that changes; and the process that is space is constituted by lesser processes, lesser changing things. Presumably, exactly the same can be said of time: it is either a Newtonian container independent of the processes ongoing inside it, or it is a process constituted by processes. Rescher claims it is distinctive of process philosophers that they ‘abandon’ the Newtonian view, which ‘plays into the hands of substance philosophy’; and adopt the Leibnizian view, which is ‘tailor made’ for process thought<sup>31</sup>.

How can we understand Rescher’s claim that, for the process philosopher, space or time is a process constituted by process? I suggest an analogy with a symphony orchestra. The music made by the orchestra can be thought of as a grand, ongoing process, continually changing and developing. This music is constituted by lesser processes: the sounds produced by, say, individual flutists or trombone players. On this picture, the orchestral music *is* the collection of sounds made by individual musicians. Similarly, we might think of time as a grand process constituted by smaller processes: the movements of existing things. This would fit neatly with Conway’s view that time *just is* the activities of creatures.

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<sup>30</sup> For more on Leibniz as a process philosopher, see Rescher (2003, 232-41). Although Merchant does not use the term ‘process philosophy’, I believe she would also read Leibniz in this way. Merchant (1979a, 172) writes of Leibniz - and the van Helmonts - that their natural philosophies are ‘organic’ in that they assign primary importance to change and process.

<sup>31</sup> Although thought provoking, Rescher’s thesis that process philosophers are *always* non-absolutists is false. To illustrate, the early twentieth century emergentist Samuel Alexander - who can be understood as a process philosopher and whose work arguably provided a source for Whitehead’s process metaphysics - argues that bodies *emerge* from motions in an independent spacetime; see my (2013).

Conway is not currently recognised as a process philosopher and she does not, for example, appear in the historical discussions of process philosophy offered by Rescher (1996) or Seibt (2016). As far as I am aware, the only scholar who connects Conway to process philosophy is Carol White (2008, 81) who argues that, whilst Conway is not a process thinker *per se*, her understanding of ‘processual nature’ has ‘interesting points of convergence’ with process thought. I suspect that White refrains from labelling Conway a process philosopher because White is especially concerned with twentieth century process metaphysics and theology, of the kind found in Alfred North Whitehead’s 1929 *Process and Reality*. Although there are points of similarity between Whitehead and Conway - for example, Whitehead conceives actual entities to be spatiotemporally extended events or processes, continually changing or becoming in an organic way - his metaphysics are grounded in an entirely different intellectual context and are, on the whole, of a very different stripe. Although it might be possible to argue that Conway anticipates Whitehead, that is not a task undertaken by White or myself. However, if process thought is taken more broadly than the Whiteheadian tradition, broadly enough to include Leibniz, then Conway owns a place amongst the ranks of process philosophers.

## 5 Final Thoughts

This paper has argued that Conway is not a proto-Leibnizian about time or space, but she is with regard to process. Conway is both further away from, and closer to, Leibniz than has been previously appreciated. In addition to explicating Conway’s views on these issues, this study has provided new insight into Conway’s intellectual sympathies. Whilst acknowledging Conway’s independence as a philosopher, scholars have long debated the degrees to which she draws on the various systems around her. For example, Coudert (1975, 643) argues that Conway’s *Principles* bear the ‘imprint of Helmont’s thought at every turn’. In contrast, Hutton (2004, 86) has argued that Conway’s *Principles* is conceived within a ‘broadly Platonist framework’, and that Conway should be placed ‘firmly’ amongst the Cambridge Platonists. I share Hutton’s view. Although there is no incontrovertible evidence that Conway’s ontology of time and space drew on More, it seems extremely likely, given their close personal relationship, their early correspondence about space, and her wider familiarity with his texts. Thus, contrary to how it seemed above, elements of More’s

views on time and space made their way into the work of one of his fellow Cambridge Platonists after all<sup>32</sup>.

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